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<Special Feature "Nakba after Sixty Years: Memories and Histories in Palestine and East Asia"> Trauma and Public Memory in Central Asia: Public Responses to Political Violence of the State Politics in Stalinist Era in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan

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**Trauma and Public Memory in Central Asia:
Public responses to political violence of the state policies in Stalinist Era
in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan**

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Central Asian (CA) states obtained their independence and statehood with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was the starting point for many in CA region to re-interpret the events of the past and attempt to construct new histories of their own newly independent republics. In many cases, these re-constructed histories re-interpret historical events and offer insights into histories from the perspectives which are aimed to oppose the Soviet historical discourses, which used to dominate history books in CA region for many decades.

Political violence and the state policies of Stalinist era (such as collectivization, deportation of ethnic groups and others) can serve as an appropriate example of such difference in historical discourses of Soviet and post-Soviet times. While Soviet historiography described the events of collectivization and displacement of people as the state policy, which was painful yet unavoidable and necessary for the development of the country, the post-Soviet discourse on these issues suggests that these were the policies of colonization and in some cases of genocide of CA peasantry and intelligentsia in order to control these republics. However, both of these polar perspectives do not always accurately reflect on how ordinary citizens regarded these issues at that time. There is a lack of input on how ordinary people remember the times and policies of Stalinist era and on how those policies and approaches affected their everyday life. That is not to say that these public memories alone can provide full and impartial picture of the situation of the public responses to the Stalinist era policies regarding collectivization, political participation, religion and ethnicity.¹ They represent “another venue of memory and identity transmission [...] operated simultaneously and competitively with history,” which may and indeed need to be contrasted and counterchecked against archival data and other sources [Crane, 1997: 1372]. In this sense, any discussion of how state policies and traumatic experiences of the past have influenced formation of current political systems in CA purely based on “official” historical accounts and “master narratives” without oral recollections of those times by individuals is incomplete and often inadequate. In Post-Soviet and in particular, Central Asian context, it is this “living history that perpetuates and renews itself through time and permits the recovery of many old

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¹ For critical review of oral history methods, see an interesting analysis by [Kansteiner 2002].

currents that have seemingly disappeared.”²

What was the effect of the Stalinist-era policies on the people’s everyday lives in CA region? How do people remember and evaluate these impacts? How are these impacts evaluated in contemporary times? These are the questions that this paper will attempt to answer throughout its main parts.

Structure of the paper

This paper firstly describes the main agricultural and other policies of the Stalinist era and highlights how these policies affected lives of ordinary people. It also uses public recollections of certain historical events and happenings in everyday life of ordinary people to demonstrate how public memory is shaping public attitudes towards political structure, government and their own participation in the politics. It then connects many political decisions of the Soviet period of Stalin years to the traumatic experiences endured by the populations of CA region. This in turn produced certain public responses identified in this paper as differentiated compliance, compromise and “silent resistance” on the part of the public in respect to political decisions.

This paper will attempt to demonstrate this through the analysis of the public memory in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan regarding political practices (repressions, administration of things, etc.), economic policies (collective farm formation, industrialization, economic cadre education, etc.), social life (forms and shapes of community and religious life in the Soviet times) of Stalin’s period.

Methodology applied

As a methodological tool, this paper uses the memories of the people’s Soviet time everyday experiences collected during the project of the “Memory of the past” (co-organized by the Universities of Tokyo, University of Tsukuba, World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent and Turkish-Kyrgyz Manas University in Bishkek) over the period of 2005 to 2008 in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The project aimed to use the recordings of the memories of everyday life in Soviet CA and where appropriate, relate those to the official recordings of history. The project targeted ordinary people (implying those not connected to the party and political elite) of the 75 years of age and over with questions regarding their everyday life experiences in the various period of their lives. The choice of the everyday life experiences of people as the main focus of this study is considered to be one of those instances which presents relatively apolitical picture of the societal life of that time, which was largely ignored in Soviet and post-Soviet studies. In addition, the information provided by the interviewed in the older age group represents a unique data which, if not collected and properly recorded, can

² Maurice Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, cited in [Crane 1997: 1377].

be lost in near future due to aging of those who experienced Soviet life-style. The loss of such data will result in false interpretations, assumptions and speculations without an opportunity to check these historical claims against the reality of everyday lives of that time.

1. Stalinist policy perspectives

Russian revolution and public in CA

Among the number of changes in the modern history of CA, Russian October revolution of 1917, revolution in Russian Turkistan of 1918 and consequent delimitation of the region into the Union republics all made significant impact on the CA populations' life-styles and mentality. Prior to these events, CA was divided dominantly into city-states ruled by Khans and Emirs and oasis steps mainly populated by nomads.

With Russian penetration of CA in 1865 and its increasing influence on the major city-states like Bukhara, Khiva and Kokand and steps populated by Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkmen nomadic tribes, region gradually became the area of Russian domination culminating in its being named as Turkistan territory under the administration of Russian-appointed Turkistan General Governorship. With the revolution of 1917 in Russia, the situation changed and these changes predetermined the development of CA for further decades.

Events of 1917 in Russia have brought both confusion and excitement to many in the CA region. With the first bourgeoisie revolution of 1917 in Russia, many hoped for various freedoms which would allow for a wide public participation in the process of decision making.

The changes brought by the second revolution of October of 1917 and birth of the Lenin-led and Communist Soviet administration emphasized the domination of proletariat and peasantry while aiming to establish the Soviet administration out of those who the Communist party considered to be exploited and taken advantage of under the previous Tsarist administration.

These drastic changes in the society on the one hand brought about the high expectations from general public that the discrimination based on racial, ethnic and religious stereotypes would disappear and that these changes would bring about freedom and prosperity for general public.

However, the evaluation of these events differed depending on social and other backgrounds of people. One group of those who opposed previous monarchy-centered administration of things in CA region moderately greeted the changes, which were brought by the Russian revolution and consequent events. As one example of such a group, one can use the case of group of intellectuals referred to as Jadids.³ Many of them were educated abroad

³ For detailed study of Jadid movement in Central Asia, see [Khalid 1999].

(outside of CA) and strongly opposed the tyranny of the rulers and lack of public participation into political affairs in CA. At the same time, they also criticized Russian imperial colonialism and those regional administrations, which accepted such colonialism and advanced its policies. These people were excited by changes brought by revolutions in the region and hoped to see CA region change for better.

However, there were also those who opposed such changes. Those opposed to the Soviet administration received substantial support from the former upper-classes and formed brigades, which started the military residence throughout the region. One example of such groups was the Bosmachi movement which regarded itself as liberators and was referred to as bandits by the Soviet administration.

As a result of such post-revolutionary situation, the general public was confused and placed in between the two major forces, one of which supported rule of working class and another one, advanced the ideas of preservation of old administration, power structures, traditions, life-styles and norms of the society. This puzzled situation is reflected in the interview below:

In the aftermath of the revolution our village was divided into “reds [communists]” and *qurboshi* [resistance leaders] and we [ordinary people] were sandwiched between them. Those who opposed revolutionaries became *qurboshi* and they both fought each other. However, there was no cohesion and trust even between *qurboshi* who were supposed to be fighting for the same ideas together.

In the entrance of our village, there was a house of Aliyor Qurboshi who attempted to protect the railroad [which was important for his own private business]. But his protection of the railroad was considered by other *qurboshi* to be an act of betrayal as they considered Aliyor to be favoring “reds.” He was killed and his corpse was thrown into the river.

When my grandmother remembers events of that time, she thinks of that time as the worst possible one. *Qurboshi* would come to the village and they will leave their tired horses and take the horses of villagers. “Reds” would come and do the same. As a result the *kolkhoz* [agricultural collective farm], which was formed in our village, was left with no horses at the end because of such rivalry and anti-public behavior of each side.

New Economic policy and reform of economy

One of the points emphasized by the new Soviet administration was the re-distribution of wealth among the population by confiscating the property and goods of those who earned them by exploiting others and re-distributing these to those who belonged to the working class

and peasantry. This was especially so in the first years after the revolution when the reserves of food stock were limited and insufficient to provide for the needs of the whole population. This culminated in the policy which was referred to as “politics of military communism” one feature of which was *prodrazverstka* (confiscation of food stock from population for the needs of the government) and *prodnalog* (tax to be paid in food-stock by everyone who owned any food-stock production capacity).⁴ Although as stated above, the policies were aimed at re-distributing and balancing the food-stock provision, it has turned into a total confiscation of any available food-stock reserves of population mainly due to the wrong interpretation of the policy and very ambiguous criteria about who is to be targeted by this policy. This policy had a number of negative implications not only for economy and well-being of citizens but also for the Soviet administration in general especially in the years of 1920–1921 when this policy was implemented using the means of enforcement. These were the years when the legitimacy and authority of the Soviet administration was increasingly questioned and led to the public discontent with its outcomes.

As a result, Soviet authorities had to correct their policies and introduce the new notion of New Economic Policy (NEP) which would allow for a greater degree of freedom for those engaged in production of food stock and small enterprises. Accordingly, this policy loosened the regulations of the food-stock tax and offered a greater advantage to those engaged in small and medium size entrepreneurship. This policy had three main goals. The first policy-related goal was to bridge an increasing gap in living standards between working class and peasantry. The second goal was related to the economic objective of stopping the slide in the living standards of population in general. And the third objective aimed at creating social environment in which society would accept the main assumptions of socialist type of economy. In this sense, the NEP policy was not so much a response to the concerns of the population but it aimed more to divert and decrease the level of dissatisfaction with the Soviet authorities and their economic policy.

Collectivization and its features

Another policy of the Soviet government in the initial years of its existence was the policy of the collectivization. The main idea behind this policy was that it was more productive and efficient to unite scarce resources and tools of production of individual farmers to create larger agricultural associations which will then increase the efficiency of production and the level of their well-being. For this purpose, the land, tools of production, livestock, seeds and other related possessions of the farmers were brought into one and composed into new collective farms. In those areas where rich farmers did not want to join in, their lands and

⁴ For details, see [Shamsutdinov 2001; 2003].

tools of production were often confiscated by the state and they themselves declared as enemies of the people. As is the case with *prodrazverstka*, the criteria for confiscating the land and creating collective farms were unclear, while the objective of uniting plots of land and tools of production always dominated the political agenda.

Among the collective farms, three types were attributed special importance: “cooperatives for common use of land” (*towarischestva po sovместnoi obrabotke zemli*), *artels* and communes. The difference between the three was regarding the land ownership rights. Cooperatives were supposed to unite the land plots of members and through common labor produce food stocks. However, in the case of cooperatives, the tools (except for livestock like horses, cows, etc.) of production could remain in private hands.⁵

Artels were the associations of farmers which were supposed to unite not only the land plots but also all the means of production, except for private housing, yard and small animals.

Communes incorporated in themselves all the properties including land spots, housing, animals and all the possessions. In the communes the labor was supposed to be conducted by all members and the products were sold out to the state. The amount of produced food stock, which exceeded the amount to be sold out to the state, was then divided into and distributed to the number of people composing the commune.

In the aftermath of the October revolution, communes and *artels* were the dominating type of agricultural production units with their number reaching 18,000 for the whole USSR [Shamsutdinov et al. 2005].⁶ However, under the influence of the NEP policy, the number of communes and *artels* decreased significantly with the collective farms (*kolkhozes*) becoming the dominating form of agricultural production.

In 1927, the XV Congress of the All-Russia Communist Party of Bolsheviks adopted the document on the usage and redistribution of land which favored collective farms over other forms of agricultural associations. In addition, the same document stipulated the notion of *kulaks* which was meant to refer to those upper and middle-class individuals who resisted and prevented creation of the collective farms. The land plots, property and tools of production of those considered to be *kulaks* were confiscated in favor of the government and later redistributed into various collective farms.

In addition to collective farms, from November of 1928, the policy of creating Vehicle and Machine Stations was practiced when majority of production tools were taken together and commonly utilized. Such common tools of production and common labor were considered to lower its costs and increase its efficiency.

Above that, in 1928, the collectivization initiatives further intensified and in addition to private land spots previously used for agricultural production, the lands spots used for

⁵ Evidence of this can be found in many sources such as [Shamsutdinov et al. 2005].

⁶ For details, see [Shamsutdinov 2003].

individual yards were also absorbed into collective farms, thus provoking further displeasure of not only individual members of collective farms who opposed collectivization from the beginning of the process but also even those who were initially tolerant to it. From this time, many started paralleling the policies of collectivization with those of colonization practiced by Tsarist Russia in CA region.

But these voices of concern of general public remained largely ignored by the Soviet authorities. On the contrary, the Soviet government intensified its policy of collectivization and on January 5, 1930, approved the VKPb Central Committee's document on the measures to promote collectivization which envisaged various punitive measures in respect to those who preferred not to participate in the collective farms. These included various measures such as depriving election rights and the right to be in the leadership positions. In addition to these measures, the *dekulakization* policy (*raskulachivanie*) was applied which implied that those who did not voluntarily contribute to the development of collective farms by giving up all of their animal and food stocks were considered to be *kulak* and to have anti-governmental stance. Many of such people were sent out to the Siberia and never returned back to their own places of residence.

2. The traumas of collectivization

The biggest implication of the collectivization for many in CA was the traumatic impact that it made by incurring human losses and damage to social status of those involved, imprisonment of a large number of people and psychological pressure for many ordinary citizens who once and for many years remembered the outcomes of the enforced agricultural reforms. These traumatic experiences also influenced everyday lives, life style and the way people related themselves to the public policy. Therefore, in Uzbekistan where the majority of population consists of the rural population and in Kyrgyzstan which used to have largely nomadic populations, this agricultural policy has a special importance.

While the reform of agricultural sector and collectivization was initiated for the purpose of alleviating the poverty and improving the production capacity of the small producers by uniting their resources, public reacted to these policies differently depending on their own social and other backgrounds. From the recollections of respondents one can assume existence of at least three types of reactions to the collectivization: those advancing and accepting it; those rejecting it all together; and those respondents who could not decide on their attitudes towards collectivization and were left largely confused by it.

By mid 1930s, a large number of people faced a reality of collectivization with several choices: to follow the Soviet authorities in their policy of collectivization, oppose and be repressed or leave the country all together.

Advancing and accepting collectivization

The policy of collectivization was aimed to protect the part of the population which was considered to be the most vulnerable and economically weak. It was for this purpose that their land plots which were considered to be difficult for them to manage and their limited tools of production were united. They were also given an opportunity to work together providing a larger workforce thus limiting the burden fallen on each individual family. Therefore, those belonging to the poor peasantry accepted this policy with enthusiasm. Many of these people in the Tsarist time would have to work for rich peasants in order to feed their families. They saw collectivization as an opportunity to jointly own the land spots and jointly develop it. For them, such policies were considered to be liberating from the dependency on those who used to employ them on disadvantageous conditions. These people felt excited by such reform.

One significant social change of the collectivization was that it called upon the joint labor of women and men on the same conditions and in the same land plots. This was a drastic change from the pre-revolutionary practices when women were not allowed to work and they had to work at home for most of the time. Although the involvement of women at the first stages of collectivization was limited and mainly dominated by Russian or Russia-educated local women, the fact that collectivization called for the equal participation of women in labor and equal opportunities disregarding the gender added some public support to the process of collectivization. The following interview is very symbolic of the time:

At that time, both urban and rural people suffered economically. My mother was activist of the collectivization movement and she would travel across wide territories to spread the most efficient seeds and explain how to take care of them in order to have a good harvest. But at that time, there were certain anti-Soviet forces in the rural areas and they once followed my mother and attempted to catch her. Although my mother was Russian, she spoke equally well in Uzbek language and that is why local people liked her and when needed they provided a place for her to hide from those following her. And this was not the only time this happened.

However, the fact that many people accepted and even advanced the collectivization policies did not imply that they were immune to the traumas of this process. As demonstrated in the interview below, although certain people welcomed the process of collectivization and voluntarily entered the *artel*, they were still discriminated against because of the suspicion of the anti-governmental activity.

My father used to have 12 cows and two horses in his possession. When the process of collectivization has started, he voluntarily entered *artel* where he worked

ever since. Nevertheless, he was continuously suspected of being anti-Soviet in his views. A criminal case has been launched against him during, which he was prescribed to stay inside his house in Bukhara. He protested vigorously against such treatment. I remember him saying that we gave everything to the *artel* and we even worked there as a family. Despite such contribution, we were still suspected. At the end, he stopped taking food in protest of his treatment and in 10 days his health deteriorated and he died soon after that.

The implementation of collectivization has been supervised by those dispatched from the governmental institutions to instruct on the details. It was these people who often interpreted the general policy according to their own understanding, which resulted in irregularities and lack of cohesion in its implementation. This was especially so, when the issue of criteria for whom to consider to be *kulak* and *anti-Soviet element* was concerned. Very often those officials dispatched to the rural areas and who were charged with overseeing the process, interpreted in their own terms the notions of collectivization and what it meant to be *kulak* or *anti-Soviet element*. This type of confusion and freedom in interpretations which was rarely reflected in the official archived documents appears in a number of recollections and interviews as exemplified by the interview below.

My father was governmental official responsible for advancing the process of collectivization in 1920s. Part of his work was also to deal with the rich famers who used to be called *kulaks* and confiscate their properties. Once, just out of curiosity, I asked him “what was the criteria that you used to determine who is *kulak*?” He said that it was all ambiguous but if one had 10 to 15 goats and 5 to 6 cows, there is no doubt that this is rich person who needed to be considered *kulak*.

While there is such diversity in evaluation of collectivization, a great number of those who accepted it opted to emphasize its positive sides. They agreed with the rationale of the collectivization and considered the importance of redistribution of wealth, enlarging the sizes of land plots for the better land usage efficiency, joint purchase and usage of equipment and government support of the agricultural producers to be crucially important issues for the developing of agriculture. Therefore, while admitting the problems and issues relating to the process of advancing collectivization they still believed it was the right way to proceed as is explained in the interview below.

Simply put, collectivization was about taking the land and seeds from rich peasants and concentrating these in the *kolkhozes*. *Kolkhozes* also acquired horses and

donkeys in the same manner. Although the time was a very hard one, such process was important to facilitate the system which made it possible to provide [wealth] for many poor peasants. I think there is a lot of criticism of the collectivization process but I do not have an intention to criticize it [from current position].

Imposing collectivization

As shown above, in the conditions when there were no clear conditions for defining whose land needs to be privatized and who is the person resisting the collectivization, the process was progressing very slowly and with a big number of various problems. Naturally, those who had lands in their possessions and those who suffered from irregularities in this process regarded it negatively and attempted to resist it. While collectivization was first considered to be a voluntary process, it turned into a compulsory one especially in certain areas, which were defined as areas of “total collectivization.” The Soviet administration first called upon those who had more property and tools of production to join in into collective farms. If people refused to do so, the process of *dekulakization* has been launched against them. Their property and tools of production were confiscated in favor of the state and contributed to the collective farms while the owners were announced to be enemies of the state and applied administrative and criminal punitive measures. The term *kulak* has been introduced which in Russian language means a “feast” and implies someone who grabbed something and does not want to give it to anyone away. The targets of the punitive measures mentioned above were not only *kulaks* but also the members of their families. Even those who were not targeted by enforced collectivization have also been requested to contribute their belongings for the collective good. Therefore, the process of collectivization covered substantially all the belongings that individual households had. According to one account,

Goats, cows, donkeys, horses were all confiscated and considered to be a collective farm’s property. As if that was not enough, they introduced the system which implied that if you had a tree in your backyard and if that tree produced any fruits, one had to pay the tax for that as well. If one produced fat and meat in the household for household’s usage that was also taxed. At the end, they even introduced the taxes charged based on the number of people one had in the household.

There were even few instances, when the same person has been *dekulakized* for more than once. Those who wanted to preserve their food stock ended up burying it into the land and hide it that way. That is why officials responsible for confiscation of food stocks would come to their houses for several times in the day and night time to check if they had anything

left, as is in the case below.

My grandfather has been targeted for three times. Every time officials responsible for the process would come to his house and take everything he had with them. My grandmother used to cheer up my grandfather by saying that they would still be able to re-acquire everything. When my grandfather was finally arrested, we with my grandmother used to visit him in prison but clerks would allow only children to go inside and see our grandfather. When we would enter the prison, there he was standing in a large yard and opening his hands to hug us. Because our grandmother was not allowed to see him, she would put a note under my hat and that is the way she communicated with him.

Because of this kind of treatment, a great number of people had very complicated feelings about the process of collectivization. This also resulted in the protests and the feeling of rejection of the process all together. This was especially so among those who, prior to the establishment of Soviet administration, already achieved certain success in their business and had some property which was forcefully collectivized by the Soviet authorities. They were termed as “*bays*”(rich).

Interestingly, even if they voluntarily contributed their property to collective farms, they were still refused membership in the collective farms, forcing them to leave their places of residence. These situations were observed with puzzle not only by those who were applied these policies but also by members of collective farms. They, on some occasions, called for dissolution of such exclusive collective farms or called for an inclusion of the former *bays* and *kulaks* into collective farms. Because, in many cases, the members of collective farms were not necessarily peasants and because the methods and techniques of agricultural cultivation were not always available to collective farms, their production efficiency fell significantly, especially in the first years of collectivization resulting in hunger throughout the CA region.

Majority of those collective farms formed on the basis of the collectivization did not have experience of functioning as one production unit and were largely involved in the cultivating fresh vegetables and fruits with little or no experience of cotton production. Despite such lack of experience, many of these newly created agricultural enterprises were forced to cultivate cotton because of the favorable international market for it and increasing needs in the internal Soviet market. The enforcement of cotton cultivation can also be traced through looking into the folklore such as songs of the time which praised cotton production (extract from a song says: Cotton, cotton, cotton, there is nothing better than it!)⁷

⁷ From recollection of Abdukhamid Kochar who ran from Soviet authorities to Afghanistan and later settled in Turkey, in [Shakhnazarov 2008 (May 29)].

Because of such total collectivization and enforced cotton production, the dissatisfaction with the Soviet administration increased and very frequently turned into violent resistance to the officials. In such situations, red army was called upon to enforce the political will of the Soviet authorities in the localities of fierce resistance. There were even cases reported when in the peasants in the collective farm would get together to the meeting of the *kolkhoz* and decide on the dissolution of the collective farm with the lands and tools of production returned to the original owners, as also testified in the interview below.

Our family was a very average family in our village. Our father worked at the factory and mother was working as a peasant. When the collectivization has started, our livestock was taken to the collective farm and we had nothing left in our yard. Our life became very difficult. I had a younger sister who was 10 years younger than I am and she was doing most of the things in the household. But one day, we learnt that collective farm could not secure the food stock for the animals. For that period, members decided to dissolve the *kolkhoz* and return the animals to original owners for the sake of preservation. In a short time, when our cows were returned to us, our life became much easier and better.

Later however, Soviet authorities would arrive in the *kolkhoz* and would forcefully call for a meeting in which they would re-install the *kolkhoz* administration and collectivize the land and tools of production again. This was very often observed in the areas where the Soviet administration used total collectivization techniques when all the property of residents at once (disregarding the social status and economic conditions of each family) became the property of the *kolkhoz* and when all residence at once became the workers of the *kolkhoz* without enquiring for the views and intentions of these people. Resistance to such methods was fiercely and forcefully prevented by Soviet authorities as is narrated in the following interview.

Right before the revolution, my grandfather had bought a land of 4,000ha which he did not want to divide into smaller plots for each of his children. He wanted to manage these lands as one piece in a possession of our family. Because of such huge land in a possession of one family, we were regarded as *kulaks* and our land, home and everything else have been confiscated. My father moved from that area and that is why he survived because nobody knew his past in the new area where he ended up living. However, my uncle remained in the area of his residence and he was treated really badly by Soviet authorities. There was a sign in his passport saying that he is “Son of *Kulak*” and that “All citizen rights are withdrawn.”

The case above is one example of how repressions against those resisting or considered to be resisting Soviet state were implemented. Yet people were still trying to deal with them at the everyday life level which at times took some comical forms as the case below.

When my father came to Tashkent, he had a document certifying him which has included the sign “All citizen rights are withdrawn” because he was coming out of the family of the *kulak*. When he came to Tashkent, relatives started thinking of what they can do with that sign because unless deleted or changed, it could become the problem for my father’s new life. The way out of this situation they found was to find a pen of the same color and add to the words “All citizen right are withdrawn” a part “not” so that it would read “All citizen right are not withdrawn.” As a result, mainly because of the chaos of that time with the documents, my father never had problems with his documents and peacefully lived his whole life in Tashkent.

The responses of people at the everyday level to the state’s enforcement and violence were different depending on their living environment. However, the feeling of enforcement of something which people resisted in their heart created hidden trauma which people got used to but still could not accept. As is depicted by respondent below,

The collectivization process progressed very slowly and with many difficulties. Everybody around me considered this process to be a lawless confiscating of the land by the government and lawless usage of that land. However, as economy moved forward gradually, people got used to the situation. They never accepted it as it is and it always appeared in their memories, but for the sake of practicality they gave up on the idea of [resisting] *kolkhozes* [and reinstating their land ownership].

Although collectivization produced a great number of negative outcomes and resulted in the situation when the efficiency of agriculture decreased, creating hunger of 1930s, it later produced some positive outcomes as government strengthened its support to the collective farms and assisted in equipping and obtaining the seeds. Some economic progress which was seen in the CA agricultural sectors in later years when the collectivization started producing some outcomes positively affected lives of people and many preferred to avoid reference to the traumas of collectivization by then. Although these traumas were not forgotten, they were not referred and very often people preferred not to recollect the excesses of these events.

Escaping the collectivization

There were a number of people who choose to oppose the Soviet administration of things in general and Soviet collectivization policy in particular through violent struggle. Therefore, they formed paramilitary units referred by Soviet authorities as “*bosmachi*” (literally translated as oppressor) headed by leaders referred to as “*kurbashi*.” They staged military resistance to the Red Army throughout the region. These units included many people who lost their properties to the Soviet administration and were eager to regain it back. In order to make their voices heard, these units would commit various violent acts against both Soviet administration and ordinary civilian population.

The Soviet authorities also used the Red Army and other law enforcement units to counteract these moves. As a result, ordinary people were caught up in between the two forces and many of them were then drawn into the civil war. Those who were caught by Red Army and those suspected of support to resistance movement were then sent to Siberia and Russia as well as Ukraine where they were placed into the working camps and collective farms. For instance according to one recollection, those sent to the Ukraine were forced to cultivate cotton which was not very suitable for the conditions of Ukraine.

Among ordinary citizens, many preferred to flee Soviet CA to the neighboring Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey or China. For instance, because there were a number of Uzbeks, Tajik, Turkmen and other groups residing in Afghanistan, many considered Afghanistan as a suitable place to flee. According to the interviews of those who flew to Afghanistan, many of the Central Asians who ran to Afghanistan were referred to as new Turkistanies. The official statistics show that the population of the territory of the Bukhara Emirate decreased from 1,374,685 people in 1917 to 831,180 people in 1926. Partly this decrease can be explained by the number of people who flew these territories.⁸

Those fleeing civil war and Soviet repressions could not freely trespass the Soviet border with Afghanistan. They therefore, needed to find an intermediary party to negotiate their trespassing with and bribe Soviet and Afghan border-guards. According to the statements of those who went through the border, they had to negotiate not the right to cross the border by land but the opportunity to cross it through the river by bribing border-guards and asking them to turn blind eyes on those who were crossing the river illegally. They had to pay both to the border-guards and intermediary brokers for their “services.” However, even if they succeeded in their negotiations, this did not mean that they could successfully cross into Afghanistan as they had to cross the river, which was a dangerous endeavor of its own as indicated in the interview below.

⁸ For data cited, see [Shakhnazarov 2008 (May 29)].

“[...] Finally we closed to the river and I started making the plot out of the leather of the 12 cows with the leg parts of leather tightly tied to each other. We spent 24 hours for this. When the plot was ready we put women and our belongings on it, tied it to the tail of a horse, while ourselves [men] were hanged on it from three sides and started swimming. We swam for 10–15 minutes in the water and we were all trembling both from the freezing water and from the fear that we will be shot dead by border-guards.”⁹

Once on the Afghan side, they were apprehended by the Afghan border-guards and taken to the city. They were not issued any documents but were given houses where they could live. Yet, many managed to negotiate with the Afghan governmental clerks and get documents issued for them for some money. After that, they moved on to Turkey which was considered culturally and geographically to be friendlier living environment than Afghanistan.¹⁰

3. Political repressions and general public

In order to achieve the goals of economic, political and social reforms, Communist party and Soviet government enforced various propaganda campaigns and when those campaigns were not effective, it enforced its decisions by various administrative methods. These were supposed to send a message to the public that the Soviet government is serious about implementing those initiatives which it declared to be the most important for succeeding in transition to the new form of Socialist and later Communist society. While it widely used the methods of convictions, it initiated punitive measures against those who it regarded to belong to the anti-Soviet elements, in the cases when convictions did not work. These included repressions against political opponents, unreliable ethnic groups and religious authorities. Such practices translated into societal traumas which later influenced the mentality of people at large and the pattern of their political participation.

The essence of political repressions and its logic

The political repressions were most frequently recorded in the Stalin's period when the process of industrial modernization and agricultural reforms encountered opposition. While the period of Stalin's rule was characterized by many as the period when the industrial and agricultural base of the country got shaped, political repressions and harsh punitive methods were largely applied both to the political leadership of the country (suspected of having

9 From recollection of Abdukhamid Kochar who ran from Soviet authorities to Afghanistan and later settled in Turkey, in [Shakhnazarov 2008 (May 29)].

10 From recollection of Abdukhamid Kochar in [Shakhnazarov 2008 (May 29)].

anti-governmental ideas) and people at large. In addition to people repressed for their real or suspected beliefs, relatives and friends of these people were also subjected to the same treatment and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment or death sentence just for being associated with suspicious individuals.

As is demonstrated above, the first stage of repressions has started with certain people being suspected of opposing Soviet government's agricultural reform agenda. In their majority, these were people declared to be *kulaks*. Their property has been confiscated by the government and most of them were sent off to the labor camps outside of CA (most often to Siberia). In addition to this group of people, those convicted of crimes and sentenced to prison terms were suspected of being anti-Soviet in their views and these suspicions remained even after their release.

In general, Soviet authorities divided the group of repressed into three main groups. The first group included people who were considered to be openly and aggressively anti-Soviet both in their views and their actions. Those falling into this group of people were apprehended, tried in *troikas* (tribunal of three judges without access of attorneys and lawyers) and the most frequently sentenced to death sentences in a matter of several hours and in one session of hearing.

The second group consisted of people who were considered to be anti-Soviet in their views but who had a potential to change their mind and to improve. They were apprehended and sent to various labor camps for 8 to 10 years before having opportunity to be released back into society. Soviet authorities not only classified these people into several groups but also provided estimates of how many out of general population needed to be potentially arrested clearly stipulating the figures. Those in the second group have been as a rule sentenced to the heavy labor and sent to the labor camps in Siberia. In many cases, they were also sent to the areas of heavy climatic conditions where the labor was especially difficult and where ordinary workers would not volunteer to go. In these cases, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its branches would address their notes to the local administrations and local branches of Communist Party in the areas of heavy climatic conditions with an enquiry about the needs of labor and if they responded by requesting labor force of labor camps, people from these camps were sent there.

After the sentences were issued, the *troikas* handed them over to the Communist Party department in Moscow which had to approve the decisions of *troikas*. In some cases, the people from the second group of those to be punished by a less severe punishment were moved to the first group of those to be severely punished according to the consideration of the Party officials. There were no reported cases, when the decision of the *troika* has been changed in favor of a softer decision. In addition to the department responsible for these considerations, the final word on the executions has been made by the Stalin and his

surroundings.¹¹

There was a detailed procedure for conducting the interrogations of people who were arrested on the suspicion of having anti-Soviet intentions. These procedures were distributed to those involved in interrogation in written form and remain as archival documents. The instructions would normally start by suggesting that once person is taken into the room for interrogation he is to be pressed with the charges aggressively and consistently. At the same time, those arrested were offered to write a note of confession to the Communist party and request for a tolerance. It was detailed in the interrogation techniques that if arrested person refused to write a note, he needed not be let back into his own cell unless he writes a note. For that purpose the instruction stipulated having interrogation for several days if needed with 2 to 3 interrogators changing each other for rest. If arrested person refused to comply, they were not given food or forced to sit straight on the chair for very long time in order to force their confession. If arrested person agreed to write a confession he was to be given some food or tobacco and then gone on with the interrogation until the confession is finally written in detail. It was important that the interrogation note taken during the interrogation by interrogators was signed personally by arrested.

The targets for arrests were also selected using a special scheme in which all the residents of certain district were enlisted disregarding their social background. These lists needed to contain very detailed information about each including their connection to already arrested people. The wives of arrested were of special concern to the law enforcement authorities as wives very often were forced to cooperate with investigation into their husbands' cases. If they cooperated with authorities they were not arrested but put under strict control of the local law enforcement agents until the cases of their husbands are given consideration. If they refused to cooperate, they were arrested right away and kept in prison. But as a rule, even those who cooperated with an investigation were arrested and sent to the camps as soon as their husbands' verdicts were issued and approved by the Communist Party leadership. There were only few exceptions as in the situations when the wives were too old to be arrested. Children of those arrested were then separated from the fathers and mothers and transferred to the boarding schools for further caretaking.

Once sent to the labor camps, it was a long time before those arrested were entitled for release. However the release instructions detailed on the conditions which included the stipulation that those being released could not resettle in big cities like Moscow, Minsk, Kiev and others. They were also often offered accommodation close to the areas of their labor camp detention in order to keep labor forces in those areas and prevent those people from returning to the areas of their original residence.

11 Evidence and detailed analysis of this can be found in many sources such as [Shamsutdinov et al. 2005: 204–216].

“Enemies of the state”

Majority of those repressed were considered to be enemies of the state. Those sentenced to the labor camps were considered to be given a chance to prove their allegiance to the state while those sentenced to death were considered the most dangerous “enemies of the state.” Among them, the special attention was paid to people, which belonged to the nationalistic intelligentsia and those who resisted Russian-dominated rule. It was enough to re-interpret or misunderstand a line in their writings in order for them to be included into the group of enemies of the state.

The reasons for these people to be given special attention by Soviet authorities was because they had social status and capacity to influence the way of thinking of other through their writings and other educational activities. Therefore, Soviet authorities made no compromises with this type of people, once they had suspicions about them.

When collectivization started in 1920s, if you had one cow or horse, you were already considered to belong to middle class. There were some people who protested such lawlessness but Soviet authorities got rid off of the people who were in the center of these protests. For instance, a number of Uzbek intelligentsia such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Fitrat, Faizulla Khodzhaev Cholpon, Bekhbudi and others were examples of those whom Soviets repressed. For example, Abdulla Qodiri in his writing called *Obid Ketmon* apparently made some kind of (political) “mistake” because of which he was punished. My father was placed into the same cell with Cholpon. Luckily my father was released, but Cholpon was sentenced to death.

Aside from writing intelligentsia, those who had an experience of studying abroad were also targeted by Soviet authorities because they were considered to be especially unreliable because of their connections and experience abroad. They were often considered spies and treated accordingly as an enemy of the state.

My father had an experience of studying under the Soviet governments’ scholarship about industrial technology in Germany. When he returned back from Germany to the University to a teaching position, he was suspected both from his colleagues in the University and from the secret police which had its offices in the University. When relations of the Soviet Union with Germany worsened, the suspicions against my father strengthened and he was arrested on a suspicion of being a German spy. Because he was an engineer, he was useful in prison and because of his work he was released. However, his brother who was only arrested because he was a brother of my father never came back from prison. My father was

never taken into Soviet army just because he was considered to be a former enemy of the state even in the years of the WWII when the army needed people the most.¹²

In the 1930s, there were a great number of people who shared such destiny. They were arrested and nobody would ever know about their destiny anymore. One example is from the interview below.

I was very young in the Stalin's period. My parents were working for the factory and there was very kind director of that factory who was liked by many. He was sincerely interested not only about the working environment of workers but also about their living conditions. But one day, he disappeared from the factory without any previous information. He was never seen after that and some of the workers even looked for him. But they were told by authorities not to have interest in his destiny and nobody heard about him ever after that.

Interestingly however, very few people link these repressions with the personality of Stalin. Majority of those asked testified that although it was Stalin who needs to be kept responsible for these events as leader of a country, it was not his personal responsibility but rather responsibility of those who presented the information to him (Beria and others) in a way that he considered it to be serving interests of the nation. Some even suggested that it was Beria and his surrounding who needs to be held primarily responsible for these repressions, thus taking the guilt off the Stalin's name. The opinion below is very symbolic of such attitude.

My father's brother was imprisoned between 1939 and 1942 as political prisoner. Ever after being released to present day he keeps telling to everyone "I do not know who imprisoned me but I am convinced it was not Stalin's fault that I was imprisoned" expressing his respect to Stalin and considering Stalin's surrounding responsible for the atrocities of that time.

Such opinions are very typical for people who experienced Stalin's rule. They contain contradictory notes on the one hand praising Stalin's tough-hand policies, and on the other hand criticizing repressions of that time which they blame not on Stalin but his subordinates. Such great respect for Stalin mainly comes from public belief that it was Stalin's leadership that made industrialization and agricultural reforms successful in addition to his strong will

¹² For instance see [Shamsutdinov et al. 2005: 78–79, 84–85].

and skillful management of USSR's performance in the WWII. In addition, the well-known fact of Stalin's refusal to exchange his own son imprisoned by German troops for German general imprisoned by Soviet troops served as a proof of personal losses that Stalin endured personally making his image close to the public. This, in addition to his modest life-style and very hard-working character made it difficult for many people to believe that Stalin, as individual, was capable of intentionally committing the crimes, repressions and atrocities of the scale that were later detailed by historians. These are exemplified by the interview below.

My family [despite the problems of deportation of people and problems of collectivization] respects Stalin very much. I believe that because of his leadership our life improved by days. I especially remember price decreases which were announced for majority of products every March. Therefore many people waited until March and only then purchased many products because they were confident that every March products became cheaper and cheaper. This added excitement and motivation to people as they felt that their lives are getting better and better on a daily basis. After a while people got used to this kind of constant improvement of the living standards and started relying on a state policy for everything.

Forced deportation and displacement of ethnic groups

In addition to the political prisoners, there was another group of people, who suffered significant traumas in the initial years of the formation of the USSR. These are groups of forcefully deported and displaced ethnic minorities who were considered by Soviet administration to be unreliable and in need to be relocated into the areas where they can both be of no harm to the Soviet interests and of help to the economy. This policy of forced dislocation of large ethnic groups was applied to many smaller ethnic groups like Volga Germans, Tatars, Jews and Meschetian Turks, with Koreans to be later example.¹³

The policy was to relocate those ethnic groups which were considered to be less reliable and less patriotic towards Soviet identity from the areas bordering other countries in order to prevent betrayal and separatism.

Therefore, such ethnic groups were deported from the places of their original residence and re-located to the Siberia and the Soviet south, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and other CA states. They were not consulted about this move and very few were given a chance to collect their belongings. While in transit, many of them died of the hardships of travel or diseases. When they were moved to CA, local population is said to be helping them with their settlement. Yet the traumatic experiences of such political move remain fresh in memories of many.

¹³ For an interesting account of life of Koreans after relocation to Central Asia, see [*Ferghana.ru* 2007 (Jul. 30)]; Also see [Kim 1993].

My parents were moved from Crimea to Uzbekistan in May of 1944. My parents had 12 sisters and brothers but when they arrived to Uzbekistan, the only survivors were themselves. My parents' sisters and brothers and parents have all died in transit because of catching bad cold and other diseases. When they arrived, they were placed in the village called Paranda and they were forbidden to go outside of that village.

Local population of Uzbeks helped and was very friendly in general. Their own lives were not too sweet at that time but they shared with Tatars everything they had. My mother was left completely alone and her first work was to cut the trees. She then got a job in the kolkhoz. Since my mother attended 7 classes of school, she was treated as an educated person. That allowed her to get a job in the boarding school and become a teacher. Because of the nature of her job, I could always be with my mother when I was little. She also spent a lot of time working because she wanted to do everything to escape from poverty [they were put in by the deportation policy]. Because of her hard work, I could graduate from school and enter medical technical vocational training school. My brother graduated from the Tashkent Technological University. I remember the way we lived our life having only one thing in our minds "to live from one day to another and survive." When each day passed we thought "it is so good that today has finished without problems."

A similar account of the life of displaced people was recalled in a different interview, as below.

I had a friend of Crimean Tatar. He was brought to Uzbekistan when he was very small kid. According to his recollection, when he was brought by train to Uzbekistan, they were told to take off the train in the step [deserted] area where there was nothing even closely remotely useful for life.

They were left there and train left the area. They were trying to accommodate themselves learning about areas around. In several hours of staying there, they saw several old people approaching. These were elders of the nearest village who saw Tatars un-boarding the train and came to see who they were and why they came to this land. This became critical moment for Tatars because these Uzbek elders helped Tatars a lot by sharing everything with them. One reason why they managed to have good relations was that both Uzbeks and Tatars were Muslims and shared common vision of how they should behave in this situation.

As can be seen from above, the policies in the Stalin's period identified the ethnic groups which could be trusted and those which could not. The latter ones were then re-settled to the areas where there was no enough labor supply to alleviate the needs of economy. In the new places, these people accommodated themselves as they could. Some started their own collective farms, while others worked in various organizations in the areas where they were dislocated. There were some other cases, when people were not forcefully resettled but joined their own ethnic group for one reason or another, as in the case below.

We are Crimean Tatars and our father with all of our family members were born in Crimea. Only I was born in Uzbekistan after we moved here. The reason for us to move to Uzbekistan was that our father was a military person. He committed some kind of mistake in his duty and was discharged from the active military service and directed to work in the Zangiota [area close to Tashkent] in the camp for criminals as officer. In 1936, he moved from Zangiota and in 1953 when the charges of misconduct were cleared from him, he left the service as the camp officer all together. We remained in Uzbekistan and never moved back [to Russia]. My father started working in *kolkhoz* becoming the tractor driver. After we became old enough one of our sisters went to Leningrad Aviation Institute which at that time was located in Tashkent [due to the fact that it was moved from Leningrad to Tashkent in the years of war] and graduated from it after the war. She then moved to Russia and lived there ever since. The younger sister went to study in Samarkand State University and after graduating from the history department returned to Crimea where she now lives. And I remained in Uzbekistan although now I have my family members in Uzbekistan, Russia and Ukraine. This seems a complicated destiny of our people.

Soviet policy towards religion and general public

The pattern of public attitude to the ideology is another interesting aspect reflecting on the relations between official policy and real situation in the society. One example is the case of religious attachments and the way they were expressed by public at large and by political establishment. As indicated above, the Soviet authorities limited religious activities and practices. Yet, religious practices were seen in everyday life of population not only in the aftermath of the establishment of the Soviet power but also throughout all periods of the Soviet administration of both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Soviet administration emphasized the leading role of the Communist party and government elite in leading atheist life styles. Such attitude limited opportunities of ordinary communists to practice their religious beliefs and even attend celebrations and funerals of the loved ones as indicated in

the examples below.

My father was communist and also the member of the local Soviet. When our relatives had some celebrations or when the *hait* celebrations were nearing, our father always went on some business trip to Russia or other republics. We always wondered why he would prefer to go on these trips during these days of celebrations. Apparently, he was trying to avoid these celebrations and he was afraid of being suspected to be religious in his beliefs. So, he would always escape these events.

When our grandmother died, we could not take her to the cemetery from our own house because it needed to be done in a religious manner. So we had to ask our relatives to have our grandmother taken to the cemetery from their house. Our father walked in the back of the body carried by many men. But our father kept his hands in the back as if he was walking in the garden or on some ordinary walk. Later we learnt that he tried to avoid the situation when people would interpret his pose in a religious way and think that he was praying while walking, although in his heart he was praying.

In a different case, neighbors described the case of famous Uzbek political figure, secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Rano Abdullaeva.

Because of the prohibition of the religious rituals, people could not go to the rituals of people they knew and even conduct rituals of their own families. I recall the secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, Rano Abdullaeva who is said not to attend the religious funeral of her own father because she was afraid of repercussions.

Another interesting case was told by a different respondent who also used to be high ranking member in the Soviet times but later served in a high school as a teacher. His story shows how religious in their minds, many members of the communist party also had to struggle with their own beliefs in order not to have problems with their career.

When we went to Iraq as members of the Soviet delegation, we had specially appointed curators of the KGB who were with us for the most of the time. Before going there we were instructed that one of our tasks is to demonstrate how great the life of the former Muslims is in the Soviet south. We were all Muslims in the delegation except for curators. When we went to the mosque, we all stand straight

as if showing off that we are not praying and that we are not religious. But our Iraqi companions prayed and when they finished praying they loudly finished their prayers by saying “Prize to the Greatness of Allah” and closed their hands to their face and covered their face as is done in Muslim world when the prayer is finished. At that moment, one of members of our delegation, as a reflex, did the same. Our curators noticed that and that person was stripped of his position and party membership even before we returned back to the Soviet Union.

Because of such strict control over Communist party members and lack of tolerance towards their religious attachments, many people gradually turned away from Communist party.

My grandmother was very religious person. But my father was communist in his believes and therefore was atheist. Because of his influence, I also proudly joined pioneers’ and *Komsomol* youth’s communist organization. When I was recommended to join the communist party however, I replied that I do not deserve this high position. By that time, I already began feeling negatively about the leadership in general and about communist leadership in particular.

I knew that if I join the party, I will be required not only not to practice religion myself but also report on those who do so. I knew that many communists were on the patrolling duties in the neighborhoods of religious institutions and then reported to the police who is attending these institutions and weather these are party and government related people.

As can be concluded from the cases above, the participation in religious practices depended on the career and social status of a person. However, the common point was that many communist party and government members still attempted to attend these ceremonies although they had to do so in secret. Among the communist party members, there used to be a difference in the degree of such participation depending on how high up the person is in the hierarchy of the power. The higher the person is, the less frequently one attended such ceremonies. The lower one’s position is, the less control has been applied and the greater was a degree of participation. Yet all of these people did not want to be seen participating and did so in rush and in secret. When it comes to the ordinary citizens, the degree of their participation was high and they tried to follow many religious and religion-related ceremonies in their everyday lives as indicated in the interview below.

General public, despite strict controls of the communist party, participated and

conducted religious rituals. My grandfather who died in the age of 110 years old, used to pray five times per day until the day of his death.

People faced different situation when they had to be in multi-ethnic environment and when they were minority among the majority of those who did not follow religious rules and practices. One example was the practice of compulsory military service when youth from CA republics were forced to join Soviet military forces and serve their terms in the remote areas. It was a general practice to send those called into a military service to the areas far from places of their origin in order to get people acquired with different environment and get them prepared for the military service not only in climatic conditions of their own regions but also in the regions drastically different from their own. Therefore, many were sent to the Siberia and other parts of Russia where there was little, if any, sensitivity in respect to the religious belief of people. These people were served pork in their food and there were not given any preferential treatment as indicated below:

When I joined military service, they sent me to Voronezh, Russia. It was constantly very cold and we always wanted to eat. Because of such conditions, the food would also contain the meat, rich in fat in order to give us some energy. We were almost always served pork and pork-made food and many of my friends from CA would refrain from eating it. They eventually would catch cold and have other health-related problems. I ate pork and I did not have a sense of guilt because I felt that I needed to survive in those conditions. There was no sense in talking about Muslim food as social and political environment in army did not presume having this kind of concerns. I ate and I thought in my mind that Allah will forgive me because of this situation. I still think I was right in my attitude.

Another case demonstrates different aspect of military service but similar attitude that people from CA had regarding it.

When we were called upon to serve in the military service, the control of religious situation in military institutions was very strict. There would be special classes on “political and religious maturity” in which teachers “preached” the main assumptions of atheism. One day the political department required us to answer a questioner regarding our religious attachments and affiliations. I answered in the way I thought questioner composers wanted me to answer. I answered that I did not believe in religion. Yet, as I wrote these words, I kept saying that I believed in Allah in my heart.

As indicated in responses of people, there was a very clear division between their religious attachments and ideology. The general public had selective attitude to both, accepting the parts of both which served to alleviate their physical or moral concerns and problems. The situation of the leadership was different as governmental control over leadership's behavior was stricter. This defined their attitude to religious and other norms and therefore naturally influenced the public perception of leadership.

4. Trauma and political structure

As a result of the political structural changes and reforms in the economy, the essence of the relations between the state and the society has also changed. The attitude of the government and its ways of enforcing policies on the public, made deep impact on the mentality of people (as indicated in the accounts of people) and produced the following three outcomes.

Re-interpretation of history

The first consequence of these policies, that many events and history in general became the subject of re-interpretation depending on the political interests of those in power. This has been seen when the process of evaluating Stalin's policies has started following his death and continued throughout all periods of Soviet history to the post-Soviet times.

In the post-Soviet period, the attempts to build and spread the sense of statehood in the CA states led many to attempt to create histories of each post-Soviet republic with their own interpretation of the flow of history. This was sometimes opposed by the scholars who advanced the Soviet official interpretation of history. As a result, what we have in both cases of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is that interpretations of various events in their history are dominated by the two discourses: nationalistic and Soviet creating two different poles.¹⁴ Such phenomenon of polarization in describing the history is not specific to the post-Soviet CA but can be seen in other regions of the former Soviet Union.¹⁵ The functional meaning of these Soviet and post-Soviet discourses serve the same functional meaning. Both were supposed to develop the sense of patriotism and devotion to their societies.

Another similarity between Soviet and post-Soviet way of interpreting the past is that interestingly, "official" discourse of each period depicted the past in somewhat negative light while associating the positive developments with the current official policy which often confronted the regimes or policies of the past. Therefore, the "underdeveloped" pre-Soviet past has always been contrasted to "progressive" Soviet present, when scholars used

¹⁴ For some examples of nationalist interpretation of history, see [Yanovskaia 2008 (Nov. 6)].

¹⁵ For similar situation in Caucasus, see [Garagozov 2005].

the statistical data of 1913 to emphasize the achievements of the Soviet economy in 1980s.¹⁶ In the same manner, the achievements of the Soviet past are often downplayed by the post-Soviet governments in CA, while achievements of post-independence years are beautified and often exaggerated. Partly, such attitude to history can confirm Mead's two points about "creating" new pasts, namely that "new pasts are most likely to emerge during the periods of rapid change" and that pasts are remembered and constructed in ways that meet group needs, especially those associated with success.¹⁷

The Soviet description of the pre-Soviet CA has been largely dominated by the Marxist approach which pictured these territories as underdeveloped areas with the autocratic rulers and feudal values. Russian and later Turkistan revolution is then placed in a position of "civilizing" force in regard to the population of these areas and offering them new perspectives in their lives.

Nationalist discourses, as is the case with other republics, are based on the simple arguments that beatify their historical roots and Soviet period as the one in which religious and ethnic features were denied. The appeal of the nationalist vision of the history is further emphasized by the emphasis of the effort to preserve "selfness" within Soviet boundaries which in national rhetoric is the indication of the "quite struggle" for independence.¹⁸

The public discourses on history in CA are mostly shaped by and related to everyday needs, experiences, identifications and mentality of people as opposed to the ideologies and political doctrines of each time. They are often not as polar as official discourses in their interpretation of history but contain positivities and negativities of each period.

Compromise

The perceptions regarding political leadership and the pattern of communications between public and political elite is seen as rooted in the patterns set by the Stalin's policies and then continued to present day. This vision of these policies and pattern of engagement between elite and the public translated into an attitude of public towards political decision and consequently influenced the pattern of public participation in the political processes. There are certain patterns of public participation in the political processes that can be seen through the answers of respondents.

The first pattern is perception of a special public-government relationship in which there is a code of conduct which both government and public accepted. The logic of this relationship is very simple and easily acceptable to the majority of respondents. For them,

¹⁶ For an example of Russian perspective of positive impact of Russian colonization of Central Asia, see [Yanovskaia 2008 (Oct. 10)].

¹⁷ For detailed analysis of re-interpreting events, see [Schwartz et al. 1986: 150].

¹⁸ For similar abuse of historical discourses in Middle East and its comparison to Central Asia see [Cole and Kandiyoti 2002].

the social order of the Soviet Union consisted of a clear division between responsibilities and rights between the state (government) and the society. In such structure, the state has primary responsibility for the provision of basic goods and services and satisfying the public needs. In addition, it was the state which was always retained the right to provide order and control the crime. It is for these aims and goals that people were prepared to bear and tolerate limitations of their political and human rights because their preferences lied in preserving the public order, political stability, which eventually translated into economic well being of the population. This was the primary reason, why many people accepted the situation of political passivism and preferred to trust and follow the judgment of political leadership of the country.

This then connects to the third pattern of government-public relations which consisted of public selectivity in respect to the political and everyday life spheres in which public developed a loyal, yet passive attitude to the political notions and ideology and used every day life as the best barometer for their political and other judgments. For many, these ideas and notions were not the ones which guided their lives but they were regarded as some changing variables which could not compare to other values and norms (ethnic, religious, etc.) which these political initiatives aimed to change. Therefore as indicated above, political leadership in the country was often criticized, ridiculed and not taken seriously. People even developed the terminology of “kitchen conversations” to describe their critical private conversations with each other regarding politics. These conversations happened very often and were not suppose to go outside the private circle. Despite such reservations regarding political sphere, people at large, appreciated the positive aspects of system functioning (social welfare, economic benefits, security) in the society and opted to follow it.

Quiet resistance

Such lack of participation of public in the decision making resulted in the situation that many people accepted many decisions which they supported or at least considered acceptable and quietly resisted decisions that they did not accept. This resistance did not take the form of open challenge to the system largely because the repressions of Soviet state of past years sent a clear message to people to never challenge openly the political decisions. Instead people opted to silently resist those decisions which they believed do not serve their interests by either ignoring those decisions or following them to the minimum. Therefore, many decisions remained on the paper or were implemented only nominally just to satisfy the ambitions of the political establishment while in reality these decisions did not have as much functionality as they originally were supposed to have.

To some extent, population took the position of “observers” in the political issues and chose to either peacefully follow or quietly reject the majority of decisions. The position of the local republic elite in CA was also the same. They initiated certain programs and decisions

and voted for them at the republican level. Yet the final word about these programs was left with Moscow and it was up to elite in Moscow to decide on these issues. One political scientist in Uzbekistan even advanced the argument that this was a strategy of the public and political republican leadership not to sacrifice too much and benefit a lot from the political system that has been in place at the time.

It was considered and entertained in public for some time now that Uzbekistan has been included into USSR forcefully and that many decisions were pushed on it. But I believe it was not quite so. I think the republican leadership of Uzbekistan deserves praise for what it did. If the Uzbek leadership openly challenged Russian and Soviet decisions, the power and majority of decisions in Uzbekistan would have been forcefully imposed on the republic. Instead, they compromised with Soviets by sacrificing independence of Uzbekistan they preserved republic and its population from massive repressions. For such obedience, Uzbekistan was given a very large degree of autonomy. I believe this was the biggest win in this [give and take game].

The general public also took passive position, having little interest in political decisions and taking very little part in majority of political events. Instead, people applied the means of quite resistance, as outlined above, in all spheres. In certain areas they completely relied on government and in others they used to behave in the way they considered to be the most efficient beginning with cultural and languages policies and to the religious issues.

5. Concluding remarks

Memories of general public regarding traumatic experiences of the past can demonstrate themselves in several ways. Firstly, as is shown in the testimonies of people in various parts of this article, memories of political violence has a longer life span than that of the policies which produced these traumatic experiences. Therefore, more than 70 years after the various economic and political reform policies were implemented people still tend to recollect the sufferings and related experiences.

However more importantly, these experiences also shape the public attitudes to the political system and the patterns of public participation. Therefore, a long history of political violence and repressions exemplified by economic (collectivization and agricultural reform), political (ethnicity-related and other) and social (religious) policies result in the lack of public engagement with the political decision-making. Consequently, people develop their own approaches to various policies and ideologies shaping their own attitudes to these primarily

through the lenses of applicability and efficiency of those to their everyday lives. As a result, people in CA developed three distinct reactive attitudes to the Stalinist era policies which can still be seen in their political systems and society. These are over-reliance on the state and political structures in main decision making without active participation in the process. When they see dilemmas about certain controversial policies, majority of respondents tend to seek compromises by accepting the policies which they consider acceptable and largely avoiding those which they can not accept. In the cases of the policies which are fully unacceptable, they do not organize meetings, political associations, advocacy of their own ideas and demonstrate in front of governmental offices, which would be the conventional reaction in many other societies. Instead, many people would apply “silent resistance,” which would demonstrate itself not only in the passive forms like ignoring policies but in acting in the way people consider “the right thing to do,” while never openly challenging the official policy.

And finally, as has been considered throughout this paper, the public memory often contrasts the perceptions of official historiography regarding the significance, evaluation or perception of certain events. In Soviet and post-Soviet times, the tradition of history-re-writing emphasized “correctness” of an “official history” and often downplayed the significance of oral sources. However, as can be seen from the testimonies, the details of the events and reasons for historical evaluations can hardly be understood without taking into account the recollection of the past made by ordinary people. It is especially so with those in the older age group, whose memories can be lost forever, if they are not recorded and archived while these people are still alive.

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